**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**PSALMS-009**. **FEASTING ON THE SACRIFICE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The meek shall eat and be satisfied."*

*Psalm 22:26*

The flesh of the sacrifice of his peace-offering for thanksgiving shall be offered in the day of his oblation. Such was the law for Israel. And the custom of sacrificial feasts, which it embodies, was common to many lands. To such a custom my text alludes; for the Psalmist has just been speaking of paying his vows (that is, sacrifices which he had vowed in the time of his trouble), and to partake of these he invites the meek. The sacrificial dress is only a covering for high and spiritual thoughts. In some way or other the singer of this psalm anticipates that his experiences shall be the nourishment and gladness of a wide circle; and if we observe that in the context that circle is supposed to include the whole world, and that one of the results of partaking of this sacrificial feast is your heart shall live for ever, we may well say with the Ethiopian eunuch, Of whom speaketh the Psalmist thus? The early part of the psalm answers the question. Jesus Christ laid His hand on this wonderful psalm of desolation, despair, and deliverance when on the Cross He took its first words as expressing His emotion then: My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me? Whatever may be our views as to its authorship, and as to the connection between the Psalmist's utterances and his own personal experiences, none to whom that voice that rang through the darkness on Calvary is the voice of the Son of God, can hesitate as to who it is whose very griefs and sorrows are thus the spiritual food that gives life to the whole world.

From this, the true point of view, then, from which to look at the whole of this wonderful psalm, I desire to deal with the words of my text now.

**I. We have, first, then, the world's sacrificial feast.**

The Jewish ritual, and that of many other nations, as I have remarked, provided for a festal meal following on, and consisting of the material of, the sacrifice. A generation which studies comparative mythology, and spares no pains to get at the meaning underlying the barbarous worship of the rudest nations, ought to be interested in the question of the ideas that formed and were expressed by that elaborate Jewish ritual. In the present case, the signification is plain enough. That which, in one aspect, is a peace-offering reconciling to God, in another aspect is the nourishment and the joy of the hearts that accept it. And so the work of Jesus Christ has two distinct phases of application, according as we think of it as being offered to God or appropriated by men. In the one case it is our peace; in the other it is our food and our life. If we glance for a moment at the marvellous picture of suffering and desolation in the previous portion of this psalm, which sounds the very depths of both, we shall understand more touchingly what it is on which Christian hearts are to feed. The desolation that spoke in Why hast Thou forsaken Me? the consciousness of rejection and reproach, of mockery and contempt, which wailed, All that see Me laugh Me to scorn; they shoot out the lip; they shake the head, saying, "He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighteth in Him"; the physical sufferings which are the very picture of crucifixion, so as that the whole reads liker history than prophecy, in All My bones are out of joint; My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and My tongue cleaveth to My jaws; the actual passing into the darkness of the grave, which is expressed in Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death; and even the minute correspondence, so inexplicable upon any hypothesis except that it is direct prophecy, which is found in They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture--these be the viands, not without bitter herbs, that are laid on the table which Christ spreads for us. They are parts of the sacrifice that reconciles to God. Offered to Him they make our peace. They are parts and elements of the food of our spirits. Appropriated and partaken of by us they make our strength and our life.

Brethren! there is little food, there is little impulse, little strength for obedience, little gladness or peace of heart to be got from a Christ who is not a Sacrifice. If we would know how much He may be to us, as the nourishment of our best life, and as the source of our purest and permanent gladness, we must, first of all, look upon Him as the Offering for the world's sin, and then as the very Life and Bread of our souls. The Christ that feeds the world is the Christ that died for the world.

Hence our Lord Himself, most eminently in one great and profound discourse, has set forth, not only that He is the Bread of God which came down from heaven, but that His flesh and His blood are such, and the separation between the two in the discourse, as in the memorial rite, indicates that there has come the violent separation of death, and that thereby He becomes the life of humanity.

So my text, and the whole series of Old Testament representations in which the blessings of the Kingdom are set forth as a feast, and the parables of the New Testament in which a similar representation is contained, do all converge upon, and receive their deepest meaning from, that one central thought that the peace-offering for the world is the food of the world.

We see, hence, the connection between these great spiritual ideas and the central act of Christian worship. The Lord's Supper simply says by act what my text says in words. I know no difference between the rite and the parable, except that the one is addressed to the eye and the other to the ear. The rite is an acted parable; the parable is a spoken rite. And when Jesus Christ, in the great discourse to which I have referred, dilates at length upon the eating of His flesh and the drinking of His blood as being the condition of spiritual life, He is not referring to the Lord's Supper, but the discourse and the rite refer both to the same spiritual truth. One is a symbol; the other is a saying; and symbol and saying mean just the same thing. The saying does not refer to the symbol, but to that to which the symbol refers. It seems to me that one of the greatest dangers which now threaten Evangelical Christianity is the strange and almost inexplicable recrudescence of Sacramentarianism in this generation to which those Christian communities are contributing, however reluctantly and unconsciously, who say there is something more than commemorative symbols in the bread and wine of the Lord's table. If once you admit that, it seems, in my humble judgment, that you open the door to the whole flood of evils which the history of the Church declares have come with the Sacramentarian hypothesis. And we must take our stand, as I believe, upon the plain, intelligible thoughts--Baptism is a declaratory symbol, and nothing more; the Lord's Supper is a commemorative symbol, and nothing more; except that both are acts of obedience to the enjoining Lord. When we stand there we can face all priestly superstitions, and say, Jesus I know; and Paul I know; but who are ye? The meek shall eat and be satisfied, and the food of the world is the suffering Messiah.

But what have we to say about the act expressed in the text? The meek shall eat. I do not desire to dwell at any length upon the thought of the process by which this food of the world becomes ours, in this sermon. But there are two points which perhaps may be regarded as various aspects of one, on which I would like to say just a sentence or two. Of course, the translation of the eating of my text into spiritual reality is simply that we partake of the food of our spirits by the act of faith in Jesus Christ. But whilst that is so, let me put emphasis, in a sentence, upon the thought that personal appropriation, and making the world's food mine, by my own individual act, is the condition on which alone I get any good from it. It is possible to die of starvation at the door of a granary. It is possible to have a table spread with all that is needful, and yet to set one's teeth, and lock one's lips, and receive no strength and no gladness from the rich provision. Eat means, at any rate, incorporate with myself, take into my very own lips, masticate with my very own teeth, swallow down by my very own act, and so make part of my physical frame. And that is what we have to do with Jesus Christ, or He is nothing to us. Eat; claim your part in the universal blessing; see that it becomes yours by your own taking of it into the very depths of your heart. And then, and then only, will it become your food.

And how are we to do that if, day in and day out, and week in and week out, and year in and year out, with some of us, there be scarce a thought turned to Him; scarce a desire winging its way to Him; scarce one moment of quiet contemplation of these great truths. We have to ruminate, we have to meditate; we have to make conscious and frequent efforts to bring before the mind, in the first place, and then before the heart and all the sensitive, emotional, and voluntary nature, the great truths on which our salvation rests. In so far as we do that we get good out of them; in so far as we fail to do it, we may call ourselves Christians, and attend to religious observances, and be members of churches, and diligent in good works, and all the rest of it, but nothing passes from Him to us, and we starve even whilst we call ourselves guests at His table.

Oh! the average Christian life of this day is a strange thing; very, very little of it has the depth that comes from quiet communion with Jesus Christ; and very little of it has the joyful consciousness of strength that comes from habitual reception into the heart of the grace that He brings. What is the good of all your profession unless it brings you to that? If a coroner's jury were to sit upon many of us--and we are dead enough to deserve it--the verdict would be, Died of starvation. The meek shall eat, but what about the professing Christians that feed their souls upon anything, everything rather than upon the Christ whom they say they trust and serve?

**II. And now let me say a word, in the second place, about the rich fruition of this feast.**

The meek shall be satisfied. Satisfied! Who in the world is? And if we are not, why are we not? Jesus Christ, in the facts of His death and resurrection--for His resurrection as well as His death are included in the psalm--brings to us all that our circumstances, relationships, and inward condition can require.

Think of what that death, as the sacrifice for the world's sin, does. It sets all right in regard to our relation to God. It reveals to us a God of infinite love. It provides a motive, an impulse, and a Pattern for all life. It abolishes death, and it gives ample scope for the loftiest and most exuberant hopes that a man can cherish. And surely these are enough to satisfy the seeking spirit.

But go to the other end, and think, not of what Christ's work does for us, but of what we need to have done for us. What do you and I want to be satisfied? It would take a long time to go over the catalogue; let me briefly run through some of the salient points of it. We want, for the intellect, which is the regal part of man, though it be not the highest, truth which is certain, comprehensive, and inexhaustible; the first, to provide anchorage; the second, to meet and regulate and unify all thought and life; and the last, to allow room for endless research and ceaseless progress. And in that fact that the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father took upon Himself human nature, lived, died, rose, and reigns at God's right hand, I believe there lie the seeds of all truth, except the purely physical and material, which men need. Everything is there; every truth about God, about man, about duty, about a future, about society; everything that the world needs is laid up in germ in that great gospel of our salvation. If a man will take it for the foundation of his beliefs and the guide of his thinkings, he will find his understanding is satisfied, because it grasps the personal Truth who liveth, and is with us for ever.

Our hearts crave, however imperfect their love may be, a perfect love; and a perfect love means one untinged by any dash of selfishness, incapable of any variation or eclipse, all-knowing, all-pitying, all-powerful. We have made experience of precious loves that die. We know of loves that change, that grow cold, that misconstrue, that may have tears but have no hands. We know of loves that are only a fine name for animal passions, and are twice cursed, cursing them that give and them that take. The happiest will admit, and the lonely will achingly feel, how we all want for satisfaction a love that cannot fail, that can help, that beareth all things, and that can do all things. We have it in Jesus Christ, and the Cross is the pledge thereof.

Conscience wants pacifying, cleansing, enlightening, directing, and we get all these in the good news of One that has died for us, and that lives to be our Lord. The will needs authority which is not force. And where is there an authority so constraining in its sweetness and so sweet in its constraint as in those silken bonds which are stronger than iron fetters? Hope, imagination, and all other of our powers or weaknesses, our gifts or needs, are satisfied when they feed on Christ. If we feed upon anything else it turns to ashes that break our teeth and make our palates gritty, and have no nourishment in them. We shall be for ever roaming with a hungry heart unless we take our places at the feast on the one sacrifice for the world's peace.

**III. I can say but a word as to the guests.**

It is the meek who eat. The word translated meek has a wider and deeper meaning than that. Meek refers, in our common language, mainly to men's demeanour to one another; but the expression here goes deeper. It means both afflicted and lowly--the right use of affliction being to bow men, and they that bow themselves are those who are fit to come to Christ's feast. There is a very remarkable contrast between the words of my text and those that follow a verse or two afterwards. The meek shall eat and be satisfied, says the text. And then close upon its heels comes, All those that be fat upon earth shall eat. That is to say, the lofty and proud have to come down to the level of the lowly, and take indiscriminate places at the table with the poor and the starving, which, being turned into plain English is just this--the one thing that hinders a man from partaking of the fulness of Christ's feeding grace is self-sufficiency, and the absence of a sense of need. They that hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled; and they that come, knowing themselves to be poor and needy, and humbly consenting to accept a gratuitous feast of charity--they, and only they, do get the rich provisions.

You are shut out because you shut yourselves out. They that do not know themselves to be hungry have no ears for the dinner-bell. They that feel the pangs of starvation and know that their own cupboards are empty, they are those who will turn to the table that is spread in the wilderness, and there find a feast of fat things.

And so, dear friends! when He calls, do not let us make excuses, but rather listen to that voice that says to us, Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not... . Incline your ear unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live.